

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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TRSE-00 /103 W

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FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 506

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 0770

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDEV, PGOV, PINS, SHUM, DJ

SUBJ: CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION AND ETHNIC POLITICS

REF: DJIBOUTI 0735

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT GOULED TAKES HIS TIME IN REFORMING HIS CABINET, DISPLEASED BY HIS OPTIONS BUT WITH LITTLE FLEXIBILITY. THE FORMER P.M. PLAYS FOR HIGH STAKES BUT WITH A WEAK HAND. MOST OF THE AFAR LOBBY RIDES THE FENCE AND FEW ARE WILLING TO MAKE THE FIRST STEP. NO ONE BELIEVES THAT URBAN VIOLENCE HAS SEEN ITS DAY DESPITE THE IMPRESSIVE EFFORTS OF THE GOVT TO UNCOVER THE BOMB THROWERS.

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2. PRESIDENT HASSAN GOULED HAS NOW HAD HIS FIRST SIX MONTHS OF INDEPENDENCE. MOST PEOPLE HERE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC OF DJIBOUTI PREDICTED THAT THE HASSAN GOULED GOVT WOULD HAVE ABOUT SIX MONTHS TO DEMONSTRATE ITS AUTHORITY. ALTHOUGH FEW PEOPLE BELIEVED THAT UNIT OF THE AFARS AND ISSAS WOULD BE AN EASY THING TO ACHIEVE, IT WAS CLEAR THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR

THE PRESIDENT TO KEEP BOTH SIDES FROM BEING RESENTFUL OF ANY GESTURES MADE TO THE OTHER. THE PRESIDENT MANIFESTLY WAS NOT ABLE TO KEEP THE AFARS HAPPY, AND THE COUNTRY IS PROBABLY AS DIVIDED AS IT WAS IN 1967 WHEN THE FRENCH EXPELLED SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF ISSAS AND PLACED FORMER POLITICAL LEADER, ALI AREF, IN FULL CONTROL OF THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION. THERE ARE PROBABLY TWO MAJOR REASONS FOR THE FAILURE OF THE PRESIDENT TO MAKE A CONCRETE UNION: (A) ONE OF PERSONALITY AND JUDGEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT -- HE HAS NEVER HAD ANYONE

IN HIS IMMEDIATE ENTOURAGE WHO COULD PRESENT THE AFARS SIDE OF THE SITUATION, AND (B) A BASIC STRUCTURAL PROBLEM -- THE PRIME MINISTER POSITION OFFERED THE DYNAMIC AHMED DINI SIMPLY HAD NO POWER OR AUTHORITY ATTACHED TO IT. THE PRESIDENT'S ENTOURAGE SO CIRCUMSCRIBED THE ROLE OF THE P.M. THAT IT TRULY WAS A FIGUREHEAD POSITION. HAD THE P.M. BEEN PROVIDED THE KIND OF AUTHORITY WHICH HIS POSITION COULD HAVE SUPPORTED, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE AFAR PROBLEM WOULD NOT HAVE EXPLODED LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY AS IT DID.

3. THE BASIC PROBLEMS REMAIN. THE PRESIDENT'S ENTOURAGE IS NOW EVEN MORE RESOLUTELY PRO-ISSA, WITH MANY OF THEM TRULY OUT FOR VENGEANCE. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL BE ABLE TO GIVE THE JOB TO ANY AFAR WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF THE POSITION. THE WORD IN DJIBOUTI NOW IS THAT THE POSITION OF P. M. MIGHT BE OFFERED TO FONMIN ABDALLAH KAMIL, JUST ABOUT THE ONLY AFAR POLITICIAN LEFT OF SUFFICIENT STANDING TO MAKE CONFIDENTIAL

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THE FIGUREHEAD ROLE OF THE POSITION USEFUL TO THE GOVT. MOST LOCAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS WOULD PREFER THAT HE NOT TAKE THE JOB BECAUSE IT WOULD MEAN PUTTING A GOOD MAN IN WHAT IS PROBABLY A TOTALLY UNREWARDING POSITION AND IT WOULD LIKELY MEAN IN INCOMPETENT TAKING OVER THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT THE DOUR MINISTER OF INTERIOR MOUMIN BAHDON WOULD LIKE TO BE REWARDED WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY POST. SUCH A CHOICE WOULD RECEIVE NOT VOTES FROM THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS -- BAHDON IS RESOLUTELY AGAINST AFARS, ETHIOPIANS, ANYTHING WHICH MOVES THAT IS NOT AN ISSA. ONE OUTSIDE CHOICE FOR THE P.M. JOB IS THAT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBER AND AFAR, BARKAT GOURAD. HE WOULD PROBABLY TAKE THE P.M. POSITION EVEN THOUGH IT WOULD MEAN THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO GIVE UP, VERY REFRETFULLY TO HIM, HIS POSITION OF FRENCH SENATOR. HIS CONTINUED

NON-VOTING MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRENCH SENATE IS AN ANOMALY, BUT IS SOMEHOW PERMITTED UNDER SOME OBSCURE FRENCH CUSTOM. JUST A FEW DAYS AGO, HE TOLD THE CHARGE THAT HE WANTED TO LEAVE DJIBOUTI POLITICS AND LIVE IN FRANCE FOR TWO YEARS SO THAT HE COULD RECEIVE HIS PENSION AS A TWO-TERM FRENCH SENATOR. HE PROBABLY KNOWS ABOUT AS MUCH ABOUT PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE AS ANY DJIBOUTIAN AND FRANKLY MIGHT BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR THE JOB.

4. IN THE MEANTIME, FORMER P.M. AHMED DINI IS TRYING TO TRANSFORM HIS PRECIPITOUS RESIGNATION INTO SOME KIND OF AFAR LEADERSHIP

ROLE. AS A LONG-TIME LPAI (HASSAN GOULED'S PARTY) SECGEN, HE WAS UNTIL HIS RESIGNATION TOTALLY IDENTIFIED WITH ISSA POLITICS AND WAS CONSIDERED AS A RENEGADE BY NEARLY ALL POLITICIZED OR OTHERWISE KNOWLEDGEABLE AFARS. THERE WERE REPORTED DEMONSTRATIONS IN DINI'S FAVOR IN THE AFAR TOWNS OF TADJOURA, OBOCK, RANDA AND OTHER

FOLLOWING HIS RESIGNATION. THESE DEMONSTRATIONS WERE PROBABLY SPONTANEOUS AND WERE CERTAINLY THE FIRST DEMONSTRATIONS EVER HELD FOR THE AFAR AHMED DINI AMONG HIS OWN ETHNIC COMPARTIOTS. UNFORTUNATELY, THE GOALS OF DINI ARE NOT CLEAR AND MAY NOT EVEN BE CLEAR TO HIMSELF. HE HAS BEEN THE OBJECT OF A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION BY
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SEVERAL FOREIGN EMBASSIES, ESPECIALLY THE EGYPTIAN, SINCE HIS RESIGNATION. EVERYONE WORKING FOR NATIONAL UNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIM BACK IN A NEW GOVT IN A MEANINGFUL POSITION. HOWEVER, THERE IS THE RESENTMENT OF THE PRESIDENT AND HIS ENTOURAGE WHO NOW LOOK UPO

HIM AS A DOUBLE RENEGADE TO CONTEND WITH. THOSE WHO HAVE CONTACTED HIM SINCE HIS RESIGNATION HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO ESTABLISH WHAT HIS TERMS

FOR RETURN TO THE GOVT WOULD BE.

5. THE RESULT IS VIRTUAL PARALYSIS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. THE PRESIDENT DOES NOT SEEM PARTICULARLY PRESSED TO NAME HIS NEW GOVT. HE EXPLAINS THAT HE CANNOT DO SO WHILE THE AFARS ARE SO DIVIDED, WHICH MAY BE TRUE. THERE IS STILL NO AFAR LEADER, DESPITE THE HOOPLA SURROUNDING DINI'S RESIGNATION. MANY, IF NOT MOST, YOUNG AFARS APPEAR HEAVILY POLITICIZED AND ARE UNWILLING TO FOLLOW ANYONE ASSOCIATED WITH THE FRENCH. APPARENTLY, ETHIOPIAN PROPAGANDA IN THE AFAR LANGUAGE HAS FOUND A NUMBER OF VERY WILLING LISTENERS AMONG THE YOUTH OF THE DESERTIC AFAR PORTION OF DJIBOUTI.

6. IT WAS THE HEAVILY POLITICIZED AFAR YOUTH WICH PROVIDED THE RECRUITMENT POTENTIAL FOR THE MPL GRENADE TEAM WHICH BOMBED THE LOCAL BAR FILLED WITH FRENCH SOLDIERS. GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE LOCAL SITUATION NOW, IT WOULD TAKE A MORE FORCEFUL PERSON THAN HASSAN GOULED TO INVENT THE PROPER CEMENT TO HOLD DJIBOUTI TOGETHER. NEVERTHELESS, DJIBOUTI'S HISTORY HAS MANY SUCH PERIODS WHEN IT APPEARED THAT NO ONE COULD KEEP THE TWO MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS FROM TEARING EACH OTHER TO PIECES. IN MOST OF THOSE PERIODS, IT TOOK THE FRENCH PRESENCE TO KEEP THEM APART. CURIOSLY, THE SITUATION NOW IS NOT ENTIRELY DIFFERENT. FRENCH PATROLS PROWL THROUGH THE CITY AT ALL TIMES OF DAY AND NIGHT. THE ROADBLOCKS ARE MAINTAINED BY DJIBOUTI SOLDIERS AND POLICE, BUT THE FRENCH CONTINUE TO BE VISIVLE -- AT THE REQUEST OF DJIBOUTIANS.
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THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR MENTIONED ON 26 DEC THAT THERE IS SOME
CONSIDERATION BEING GIVEN TO INCREASING THE FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE.
IN THE END, IT JUST MAY BE NECESSARY FOR AN OUTSIDER TO PROVIDE
THE STABILITY WHICH THIS COUNTRY CANNOT PRODUCE FOR ITSELF.
CLARKE

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